

# Help free abducted Chibok girls

## Nigerian leader urges Ban Ki-moon on the sidelines of UN gathering of leaders

AP, Lagos

Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari has invited the United Nations to help negotiations to exchange the kidnapped schoolgirls from Chibok for detained leaders of Boko Haram, a government statement said yesterday.

Buhari's government has been criticized for failing to free the Chibok girls by parents of the abducted students, community leaders and human rights activists. Boko Haram has kidnapped thousands of people, but the mass abduction of 276 schoolgirls in April 2014 brought international condemnation of Nigeria's home-grown Islamic extremist group. Dozens of the girls escaped, but 217 remain missing.

Buhari's request for UN intermediaries is a "show of commitment" made to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Wednesday on the sidelines of the annual UN gathering of world leaders in New York, said a statement from presidential adviser Femi Adesina.

Buhari told Ban that his government is "willing to bend over backwards" to win the girls' freedom but finding credible Boko Haram leaders for negotiations has been difficult, especially because of the current leadership struggle among the extremists.

Longtime Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau's faction in August posted a video showing about 50 Chibok girls and offering a prisoner swap. An unidentified fighter in the video suggests the government deal with a journalist trusted by the extremists. That was an apparent reference to Dubai-based Nigerian journalist Ahmad Salkida, who was subsequently detained by Nigerian intelligence agents and

released. He was accused of knowing the whereabouts of the girls, which he denied.

Last week, Information Minister Lai Mohammed said the government had nearly secured the girls' release three times but negotiations collapsed.

One activist with the Bring Back Our Girls campaign, Washington-based Nigerian Emmanuel Ogebe, said the United Nations is not a suitable intermediary since it has been a victim of Boko Haram attacks. He suggested a better choice would be France, which has helped negotiate the release of Boko Haram kidnap victims in neighboring Cameroon.

Boko Haram attacked the UN's Nigeria headquarters in Abuja, the capital, in August 2011 with a car bomb that detonated in the reception area, killing at least 21 people.

Last month, the extremists launched a rocket attack on a humanitarian convoy under military escort in northeast Nigeria, wounding three people including a Unicef worker.

That caused a halt to UN aid to dangerous-to-reach areas outside Maiduguri, the biggest city in northeast Nigeria and birthplace of Boko Haram.

Most girls kidnapped by Boko Haram have been forced to marry fighters and are pregnant or have babies, according to some people freed in the past year as the military has recaptured territory.



A man stands on a car in uptown Charlotte, North Carolina, USA to protest the police shooting of Keith Scott on Wednesday night. Inset, a man is hit with pepper spray paint balls. A second night of race-related clashes in Charlotte has left one protester on life support, with the renewed violence prompting the governor to declare a state of emergency.



PHOTO: REUTERS

# UN resumes aid convoys

AFP, Geneva

UN aid convoys starting rolling in Syria again yesterday, after a deadly attack on humanitarian trucks and a warehouse triggered a suspension in deliveries.

"Today we are sending an inter-agency, cross-line convoy with urgently needed aid to people in a besieged area of rural Damascus," United Nations humanitarian agency (OCHA) spokesman Jens Laerke said in a statement.

"We have resumed aid deliveries based on the humanitarian imperative," he added.

Laerke told AFP in an email that this was the first convoy to head towards a besieged area since Monday's attack on a humanitarian convoy which killed around 20 people, including a Red Cross staffer.

Food aid for rebel-held east Aleppo, which has been stalled at the Syrian border since last week, will go bad in days, the UN said, urging Assad to clear the delivery.

"Forty trucks are sitting at the Turkish-Syrian border. The food will be expiring on Monday," the head of the United Nations humanitarian taskforce for Syria, Jan

Egeland, told reporters in Geneva.

The UN has estimated that roughly 600,000 people are stuck in Syria's 18 besieged areas. Accessing them, and others in so-called hard-to-reach areas has become a top UN priority.

Meanwhile, huge blazes erupted in Aleppo as the city was rocked by fighting and air strikes yesterday, ahead of last-ditch efforts by world powers to salvage a failed ceasefire.

**SYRIA WAR**  
Aleppo set ablaze ahead of fresh diplomatic efforts  
Opposition 'minister' among 12 dead in car bomb

The top diplomats from the United States and Russia were to meet with other key players in New York later yesterday, after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Syria's peace process was facing a "make or break moment".

A "minister" in Syria's opposition government was among at least 12 people killed in a car bomb attack in the south of the country yesterday, the body's spokesman said.

"Twelve people, including the (opposition) provisional government's local administration minister, Yaacoub al-Ammar, were killed" and dozens more were wounded, Shadi al-Jundi told AFP by telephone.

# Assad blames US for Syria truce collapse

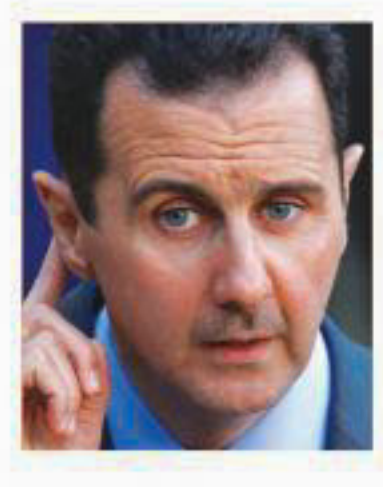
AP EXCLUSIVE  
AP, Damascus

Syria President Bashar Assad rejected US accusations that Syrian or Russian planes struck an aid convoy in Aleppo or that his troops were preventing food from entering the city's rebel-held eastern neighborhoods, blaming the US for the collapse of a cease-fire many had hoped would bring relief to the war-ravaged country.

In an interview with The Associated Press in Damascus, Assad also said deadly US airstrikes on Syrian troops last week were intentional, dismissing American officials' statements that they were an accident. Assad said the US lacked "the will" to join forces with Russia in fighting extremists.

Assad said his enemies alone were to blame for nearly six years of devastation across Syria, and while acknowledging some mistakes, he repeatedly denied any excesses by his troops. He said the war was only likely to "drag on" because of continued external support for his opponents. "When you have many external factors that you don't control, it's going to drag on and no one in this world can tell you when" the war will end, he said, insisting Syrians who fled the country could return within a few months if the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar stopped backing insurgents.

He spoke Wednesday in Damascus' Muhajireen palace, a white-stone building where he often receives guests, nestled among trees on the foothills of Qasioun Mountain.



# Iraq declares recapture of town from IS

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq yesterday announced that its forces have recaptured a northern town from the Islamic State group in an operation launched ahead of a push for the city of Mosul.

Security forces began the operation on Tuesday to oust the Islamic State group from Sharqat, a town near supply lines needed for the battle to retake second city Mosul from the jihadists.

Iraqi forces "completely liberated the Sharqat district and raised the Iraqi flag over the government headquarters" in the town, the country's Joint Operations Command said in a statement that hailed the speed of the operation.

Both Iraqi aircraft and the US-led coalition provided air support for the operation, the statement said.

The town lies on the west bank of the Tigris river in Salahaddin province, 260 kilometres (160 miles) northwest of Baghdad and around 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of Mosul.

Iraqi forces bypassed Sharqat to retake a key military base to its north as well as the neighbouring town of Qayyarah, but then turned their attention to the continued IS presence behind their front lines.

IS overran large areas north and west of Baghdad in 2014, but Iraqi forces backed by US-led air strikes and training have since retaken significant ground including the cities of Tikrit, Ramadi and Fallujah.

Top US military officers have hinted that the final push for Mosul could begin next month, but there are still significant military, political and humanitarian obstacles between the launch of the operation and entering and retaking the city.



Red Crescent members help Syrian opposition fighters and their families carry their belongings as they change buses at a Syrian army checkpoint on the edge of the rebel-held Waer neighbourhood in the central city of Homs during an evacuation operation yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Dozens more feared dead off Egypt coast

AFP, Rosetta

Rescuers brought more bodies to shore yesterday a day after a boat crowded with migrants capsized off the coast of Egypt, drowning at least 51 people.

Survivors said up to 450 migrants were on board the fishing vessel when it sank about 12 kilometres (eight miles) off the coast of Rosetta, an Egyptian Mediterranean port city, on Wednesday morning.

The military has said 163 survivors have been rescued so far, with a health ministry official saying 51 bodies had been retrieved by yesterday afternoon.

An AFP correspondent saw a military boat bringing six bodies to shore yesterday, laying them out in body bags.

One contained the corpse of a child. His grandfather recognised him and knelt next to the body, in shock.

Rescuers said search operations would focus on the boat's cold storage room where witnesses said around 100 people sought refuge as the vessel flipped over.

"The death toll is going to rise," a medical source told AFP. "On the boat there is a hold used to store fish. It hasn't been opened and there must be a lot of people inside."

The deadly accident comes months after the EU's border agency Frontex warned that growing numbers of migrants bound for Europe were turning to Egypt as a departure point for the dangerous sea journey.

Trafficers often overload the boats, some of them scarcely seaworthy, with passengers who have paid for the crossing.

On a beach near Rosetta yesterday, a small crowd gathered with some reading verses from the Koran and others desperately seeking information on relatives who may have been on board.

Many survivors were in police custody early yesterday. A prosecution official said they would be treated like "victims and not perpetrators" and would be released.

Witnesses spoke of the harrowing moment their vessel, carrying up to 450 people, keeled over due to overcrowding, as well as the agonising hours-long wait for help to arrive.

## MIGRANT BOAT TRAGEDY

# US about to lose control of internet: Trump

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Republican nominee has been attacked for his approach to the internet in the past. Earlier this year he said that he wanted to "close up" the internet, and that he would speak to powerful people including Bill Gates about doing so.

But his newest statement is perhaps his strongest statement yet of his views on the web, and how it needs to be protected. Trump claimed that the US is about to "turn control of the Internet over to the United Nations and the international community", and that while Republican politicians were working hard to "save the internet", it couldn't be done without the help of the American people.

Trump's statement appears to refer to a specific and highly technical part of the infrastructure that runs the internet.

At the end of this month, the US Department of Commerce will hand over control of ICANN, which looks after who owns specific domain names, to the global community. That transition has been long planned and it is an attempt to move the

control of one of the central parts of the internet into the global community.

But Trump has said that the move is actually a way of turning "control of the Internet over to the United Nations and the international community". Internet freedom is at risk from the move, he wrote, and giving control of ICANN up to the international community might mean letting China and Russia impose more censorship.

Trump didn't say exactly how that censorship will work. Countries including China and Russia already censor large parts of the internet, and people including web inventor Tim Berners-Lee have made clear that there is no clear way of using ICANN to stop others doing so or censor the internet any more easily.

"The misguided call for the United States to exert unilateral control over ICANN does nothing to advance free speech because ICANN, in fact, has no power whatsoever over individual speech online," wrote Berners-Lee and former White House technology chief Daniel Weitzner in an editorial in the Washington Post this week.



# Duterte invites UN chief to probe killings

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday invited the United Nations' chief and international human rights experts to investigate allegations of widespread extrajudicial killings, but insisted they also face him in a public debate.

The acid-tongued Duterte had earlier used vulgar language to dismiss criticism from the two organisations and the United States of his bloody war on crime, which has claimed over 3,000 lives since he took office on June 30.

"I have invited the (United Nations human rights) rapporteur, (UN chief) Ban Ki-moon, the EU, their lawyers to come here and investigate me," Duterte said in a speech, adding the formal invitations would be sent soon.

"But... after they question me, I will question them, one by one in open forum... then you will all see how I will beat those devils." The 71-year-old former city mayor won elections in a landslide in May after vowing to eradicate the illegal drug trade in six months.

# No evidence MH370 exposed to fire

Say Australian authorities after pieces of debris recovered in Madagascar appear to show burn marks

AGENCIES

Australian authorities have cast doubt on the theory that Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 may have had a fire on board before it went missing.

Earlier this month, pieces of debris appearing to show burn marks were recovered in Madagascar.

However, authorities say there is no evidence yet that the debris came from MH370 - and the dark marks were caused by resin on the debris, not fire.

MH370 had 239 people on board when it vanished in March 2014.

The flight, which was flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, is presumed to have crashed into the southern Indian Ocean after veering off course. The five fragments had been

found by debris hunter Blaine Gibson, who has previously found other parts of the plane.

The pieces were recovered near Sainte Luce, in south-eastern Madagascar.

Two of the pieces appeared to show burn marks, which, experts said, could provide more information on what happened to flight MH370 if confirmed.

However, Australian Transport Minister Darren Chester said yesterday that an initial investigation showed that "contrary to speculation there is no evidence the item was exposed to heat or fire".

The dark markings on the two pieces of debris "related exclusively to a translucent resin that had been applied to those surfaces", a report from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau said.

